Creating Accessible Microsoft 365 Word Documents (Mac)

This quick guide introduces best practices for creating accessible Microsoft 365 Word documents. Following these steps helps ensure documents are usable by people who rely on keyboard navigation and assistive technologies such as screen readers and text-to-speech tools.

1. Add a Document Title

Every accessible Word document should include a clear document title. Screen readers use the title to identify the document.

To add a document title in Microsoft 365:

- Select **File** > **Properties**.
- Add a meaningful title in the **Title** field under the **Summary** tab.
- Save the document.

2. Use Headings for Structure

Create a logical heading structure using Word's built-in Styles. Headings allow screen reader users to navigate efficiently and improve readability for all users.

To add headings:

- Select the text.
- Choose **Heading 1**, **Heading 2**, or **Heading 3** from the **Styles** group on the **Home** tab.

NOTE: You can also use the keyboard shortcuts: **CMD + OPT + 1** (Heading 1), **2** (Heading 2), or **3** (Heading 3).

3. Add Alternative Text to Images

Alternative text descriptions (also known as *alt text*) provide descriptions of images for users who are unable to view them. This is particularly critical for blind and low-vision users.

To add *alt text* in Microsoft 365:

- Right-click the image and select **View Alt Text...**
- Enter a concise, meaningful description.
- Select the **Mark as decorative** checkbox to identify images that provide no meaningful or instructional value.

NOTE: Do not use **Generate a description for me**. This feature is not sufficient for accessibility purposes.

Adapted from *Project GOALS* (NCDAE). Original materials available at: https://www.ncdae.org/goals.

4. Use Built-In Columns

When using columns, always use Word's column feature rather than tabs or spaces.

To create columns:

- Select the **Layout** tab.
- Choose **Columns**.
- Select a two-column layout for better readability and accessibility.
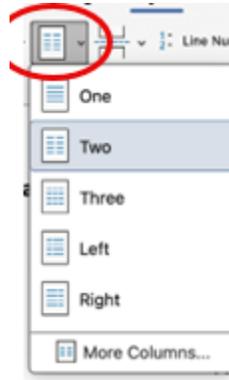
5. Create Accessible Tables

Tables should be created using the **Insert Table** feature.

Best practices:

- Keep tables simple. One row for column headers and one column for row headers.
- Select the **Header Row** checkbox to identify column headers. If applicable, use the **First Column** checkbox to identify row headers.
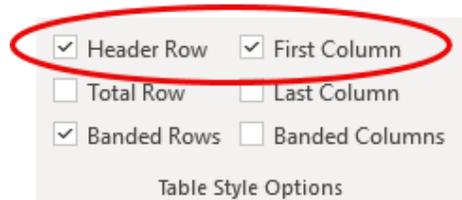
NOTE: Avoid blank or merged cells and nested headers. This information cannot be properly associated with table headers in Word documents.

6. Use Meaningful Hyperlinks

Avoid using raw URLs as link text. Screen reader users benefit from descriptive links.

To edit a hyperlink:

- Right-click the link and select **Hyperlink** > **Edit Hyperlink...** (or press **CMD + K**).
- Update the **Text to Display** field with meaningful text.
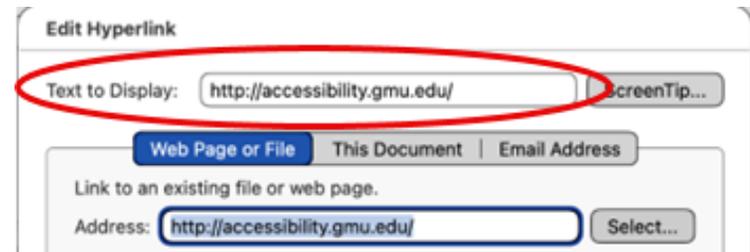
7. Use Proper Lists

Use Word's built-in numbered and bulleted lists rather than typing numbers or symbols manually.

To create a list:

- Choose either the **Bullets** or **Numbering** tool from the **Home** tab.
- Enter text.

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8. Run the Accessibility Checker

Microsoft 365 includes an Accessibility Checker that helps identify issues.
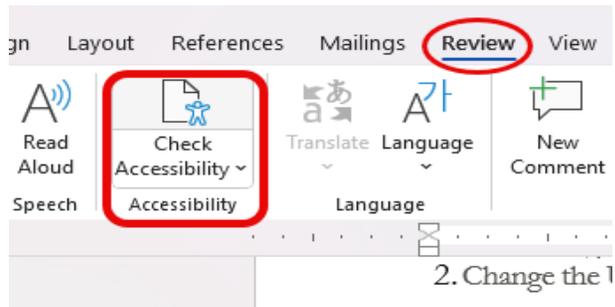
To run the checker:

- Select **Review** > **Check Accessibility**.
- Review errors, warnings, and tips.
- Follow the suggested fixes.

9. Additional Accessibility Tips

- Use plain language.
- Use a minimum font size of 12 points.
- Ensure sufficient color contrast.
- Use **Insert** > **Equation** for entering mathematical expressions. Do not enter them manually.